

THE BEST OF
**the Jimmy
Castor
Bunch**



THE EVERYTHING MAN

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RHINO

This Compilation
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17. **I PROMISE - Jimmy Castor & The Juniors**

Original Recordings Produced by CASTOR—PRUITT PRODUCTIONS,
 LUCHI DE JESUS & CASTOR—PRUITT-THOMAS

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Jimmy Castor, The E-Man—multithreat singer, writer, arranger, saxophonist, percussionist, and producer. With the exception of James Brown, no other performer's music has weathered the changes in R&B over the last 40 years as well as Jimmy Castor's. From the street-corner harmonies of Sugar Hill to the scratching turntables of today, Castor's music has been in the limelight for almost four decades now, still vital, never dating.

Jimmy Castor (born June 2, 1943) was a product of Harlem's Sugar Hill. The early 1950s were exciting times on Edgecome Avenue. It was the dawn of the rock 'n' roll era, and just as sure as rolling rhythm & blues was a product of New Orleans and rockabilly the spawn of Memphis, New York's indigenous rock 'n' roll sound was the street-corner harmony of doo-wop, and every corner in the city had its groups. In Sugar Hill, The Valentines, The Harptones, The Clefones, and The Scarlets were the local stars, all having made it downtown to cut discs.

It was The Teenagers (originally The Premiers), however—"the first super group," as Jimmy would remember them—that first ruled the corner of Edgecome Avenue and 164th Street and later the world. Castor was raised alongside The Teenagers, attending Public School 169 and Junior High School 164 with the pint-size star Frankie Lymon. When The Teenagers exploded on the national scene in early '56 with "Why Do Fools Fall In Love," Jimmy Castor was hot on their heels, forming his own vocal group—

Jimmy & The Juniors (Al Casey Jr. singing bass, Johnny Williams, tenor, and Orton Graves, baritone). They managed to hook up with Wing, Mercury's R&B subsidiary for their debut disc, "I Promise To Remember," which The Teenagers would cover and take into the Top 10 in the summer of '56. The Juniors cut a second disc in early '57, "This Girl Of Mine," for the tiny Atomic label, before splitting up the same year. Having gotten his feet wet, young Jimmy Castor jumped into the hustle and bustle of the New York record business headfirst.

By late '57 Castor was subbing for Frankie Lymon, who had split from The Teenagers and was just beginning the long decline that would end 11 years later when he OD'd in his grandmother's bathroom. Castor no doubt learned some valuable lessons from witnessing all of Lymon's mistakes firsthand, for as Lymon's star descended, Castor's would slowly rise and rise and rise.

Castor's stint with The Teenagers was a brief one, and soon he was involved with new outfits such as The Clintonian Cubs and The Casals. An accomplished alto and tenor saxophonist, he soon found work as a studio musician, making himself an invaluable addition to many sessions (that's him blowing tenor on Dave "Baby" Cortez's great '62 instrumental smash "Rinky Dink"). These were Jimmy's years of internship, where he would learn his craft in the studios and clubs, building his arsenal of talents, forging the personality that would eventually emerge as The Everything Man.

Castor recorded a few singles for the My Brothers label with the Clintonian Cubs in the early 1960s before his first solo sides for Jet Set ('65), Decca ('66), and then Smash, a subsidiary of Mercury, the label he had started out on.

By 1966 there was a new sound in Harlem; doo-wop was out (although it would never die, experiencing regular revivals into the 1990s). The new sound, inspired by the large and growing Puerto Rican population of Harlem, was dubbed Latin soul, and locals like Ray Barretto ("El Watusi") and Joe Cuba ("'Bang' 'Bang'") were the new stars uptown. By now Castor had added timbales and vibes to his arsenal of talents and with his longtime writing and producing partner John Pruitt came up with one of the all-time great New York Latin soul discs—"Hey, Leroy, Your Mama's Callin' You." "Hey, Leroy" was and is irresistible, with its fat melodic bass line, descending piano triplets, timbales, and conga grooves, wailing sax, and call-and-response refrain—"go to yo' mama, go to yo' mama." By Christmas week of '66 it had risen to #16 on *Billboard's* national R&B charts (#31 pop), but in Harlem it was as good as #1 and would be sung by kids on the baseball fields and playgrounds of New York for a decade. Smash issued an LP to cash in on the hit in early '67. The *Hey Leroy* album was a mixed bag, featuring the title track, a couple of nice originals (heard here is "Southern Fried Frijoles," another fine Latin jam), as well as a couple of cover tunes—"Winchester Cathedral" and "Old Man River"—that even when

heard are not to be believed. Castor had developed a penchant for cover tunes so seemingly inappropriate as to often come across as downright surreal. He would go on to fill out LPs with versions of "Purple Haze," "You Light Up My Life," "Daniel," and "Stairway To Heaven."

Smash was never able to aptly follow up on the success of "Hey, Leroy," even when Castor presented them with a natural follow-up with "Leroy's In The Army," so soon he left Smash and cut sides for Compass ('68), Capitol ('68-'69), and Kinetic ('70) before being inked to RCA in '71.

By this time the billing was The Jimmy Castor Bunch, and in addition to Jimmy on sax, timbales, and vocals were Gerry Thomas on trumpet and piano, Harry Jensen on guitar, Lenny Friddle, Jr., on congas, and old Harlem doo-wop buddy Doug "Bubs" Gibson (formerly of The Vibraharp) on bass. Their first LP—*It's Just Begun*—was released in March 1972, followed by the single, "**Troglodyte (Cave Man)**," and soon it was off to the races.

It's Just Begun is Castor's masterpiece, the most fully realized example of his vision and his most successful album to boot. In addition to tapping into his doo-wop and Latin soul roots, The Jimmy Castor Bunch had developed a relentlessly funky groove, with full-bodied churning bass, ultradistorted fuzz-tone guitar, and layered percussion. "Troglodyte (Cave Man)," which exemplifies this, was one of the monster records of '72, rising to #6 on the pop charts by May of that year, as well as being one of the discs that

defined that coming funk explosion of the mid-'70s. Opening with a spoken word introduction (which would become a favorite sample of old school rap DJ Afrika Bambaataa at New York's Roxy disco)—"There was a time when men lived in caves. . . . Now we're gonna go back, way back . . . cave men, cave women, Neanderthal, Troglodyte!"—the groove fades in, and Castor begins the wild and woolly tale of primitive love. It's funny, menacing, and funkier than anything that had come before it. There had never been a groove this fat blasting out of AM radio. Castor's approach to prehistoric sexism was so obviously tongue-in-cheek and full of good humor that even in those heady years of social outrage and the women's movement (remember this was the same year that John Lennon was to inform us that "Woman Is The Nigger Of The World"), nary a feminist complained; to the contrary, the song's central figure—Bertha Butt (one of The Butt Sisters)—would become (along with the aforementioned Leroy) Castor's most beloved character. Ending with the echo-laden scream "Hot Pants! Hot Pants!" "Troglodyte (Cave Man)" is one of the pinnacle moments of '70s funk.

"**It's Just Begun**," the LP's title track, has never been issued as a single but remains one of Castor's best-known classics. The track turned up in *Flashdance* and *Beat Street* in the film's big break-dance "battle" scenes. It also can be found as a sample on countless rap discs and is heard on the dance floor to this day (thanks to many bootleg '12" singles that made the rounds in the '80s). "It's Just

Begun" was probably too far ahead of its time to be a hit in '72 when it was issued; today it sounds totally contemporary, with Castor's blaring sax figure riding over both fuzz-tone and wah-wah guitar riffs and a groove to end all grooves. "Just watch me now!" shouts Castor, and this time the whole world *was* watching, and listening.

The Jimmy Castor Bunch cut two more LPs for RCA in 1972 and 1973. *Phase Two* was perhaps even more relentless than *It's Just Begun*, one long thundering groove jam from which we've chosen "**Say Leroy (The Creature From The Black Lagoon Is Your Father)**," a tune that reprises his first big hit, grafting the continuing saga of Leroy onto a "Troglodyte"-style deep groove. This was followed by *Dimension III* in 1973, yet another solid collection. But RCA failed to capitalize on Castor's momentum, and his only other chart showing for the label was the instrumental ballad "Soul Serenade."

In 1974 The Jimmy Castor Bunch switched labels to Atlantic. The first effort for the new label was billed as *Jimmy Castor (The Everything Man) And The Jimmy Castor Bunch*. The first single released was "**Maggie**," a super funk-ed-up rendition of a tune by the Native American rock group Redbone (of "Come And Get Your Love" fame), and here's one example of how Jimmy's oddball choice in cover tunes was right on target; it remains one of his finest recordings. It never charted, however, and by their second Atlantic LP Castor returned to what he knew the public



wanted—more Bertha Butt!

In "**Bertha Butt Boogie**," Bertha, her sisters, the Troglodyte himself, and Leroy are all reprised against a funky wash of guitars and percussion (Jeff Grimes had replaced Harry Jensen on guitar). It kicked off a string of R&B hits that lasted for five years. "Bertha Butt Boogie" rose to #16 on the pop charts in late 1974 and is featured on the classic LP *Butt Of Course...*, whose garish cartoon cover depicts Jimmy in his E-Man costume (much like Superman's suit) chasing down Bertha. The second single from *Butt Of Course...*, "**Potential**," written by prolific drummer Ellwood Henderson, Jr. (who had replaced Bobby Manigault when the Bunch moved to Atlantic), kicks off like a Kool & The Gang disc but soon mutates into a wicked James Brown parody. It reached #25 on the R&B charts in the spring of '75.

Now enamored with his own E-Man incarnation, the next LP, *Supersound*, was issued in late '75, once again depicting Jimmy as a cartoon superhero on its cover. Keeping to the ever-popular jungle theme, the first single was the fabulous "**King Kong**" (although it refers to Kong by Tonto's nickname for the Lone Ranger, "Kemo Sabe," and kicks off with a Chinese gong!); another monster groove number, it rose to #23 R&B and #69 pop and has been a New York dance floor staple ever since. The next single, the album's title track, "**Supersound**," kept the party going and hit #42 on the R&B chart in the winter of '76. By this point, disco had taken over from hard-core funk as the

popular form of R&B in America, but Jimmy, who'd pretty much invented the shit with "It's Just Begun," wasn't about to sweeten things up to compete. In "Supersound" he sings, "Listen to the rhythm section pound!" and it does—no syrupy strings and gooey gal chorus for these hard-core groove dealers. Castor's timbales, featured prominently, tell the story, but Jimmy, of course, couldn't get through the number without dropping Bertha Butt's name at least once. A killer version of Exuma's "**Bom Bom**" became the third single to chart from the *Supersound* LP, hitting the lower reaches of the R&B charts in May 1976.

The Bunch's next Atlantic long-player, *E-Man Groovin'*, contained more than a healthy dose of the hard stuff, including "**Space Age**" (once again from the pen of drummer Henderson), which introduced synthesizer to the Bunch's lineup as well as new bass player, Paul Forney. "Space Age" can be interpreted as a cry against the encroaching mechanization of R&B as Jimmy sings, "Don't be a robot/In the space age." It hit #28 R&B and #101 pop (his last pop chart entry to date). As if to take a stance for hardness in a soft era, the cover of *E-Man Groovin'* is graced with a photo of Jimmy resplendent in leathers, shades, and Afro posing with his motorcycle, the words "E-Man" and "Kong" painted on its side.

And the grooves kept comin'! Though 1977 was the year of *Saturday Night Fever* disco mania, The Jimmy Castor Bunch was still a churning funk machine, as witnessed by yet another reprise of Leroy (now age 11) with the single "**The Return Of**

Leroy Pt. I." Its failure to chart is more a comment on the sad state of the public's taste than anything else; this track is some bona fide *good shit*. The album *Maximum Stimulation* followed; it was another solid Castor Bunch effort, and the title track (once again from the pen of Henderson) became the second single, this time hitting the lower reaches of the R&B charts in the final weeks of '77.

It was in 1977 that Castor once again delved into his doo-wop roots (although he'd never really forsaken them, even cutting a funk-ed-up version of "I Promise To Remember" on the *It's Just Begun* LP in '72), issuing a strange album—*Jimmy Castor Remembers Yesterday*—on the Crystal Ball label. The album included the original '50s sides by Jimmy & The Juniors along with unissued tracks by The Clintonian Cubs, The Casals, and several tracks with the remnants of The Teenagers, led by bass singer Sherman Garnes. The original "**I Promise**" is included on this collection for historical value.

Castor's tenure with Atlantic ended in '78 and 1979 saw him signed to Drive, a subsidiary of Miami's soul powerhouse T.K. (home of KC & The Sunshine Band, et al). "**Let It Out**," yet another of Ellwood Henderson, Jr.'s driving grooves, was as good as R&B got in '79 but it failed to chart. The *Let It Out* album (Jimmy as a protogangsta waving a shotgun on the cover) was a good one, especially "Bertha Butt Encounters Darth Vader," which more than balanced out the inclusion of a version of Debby Boone's dire "You Light Up My Life."

The same year brought a switch to yet another new label, this time Cotillion, a subsidiary of Atlantic better known for Southern rock. But "**Don't Do That!**" (in which Jimmy admonishes a beast, "Don't do that!") hit #50 R&B, his best showing since "Space Age" three years earlier; it remains one of the Jimmy Castor Bunch's strongest tracks. The solo Cotillion LP, *The Jimmy Castor Bunch*, was released in June; though it was another good 'un, Jimmy and the Bunch were soon out on their own again.

The 1980s saw Jimmy Castor hit the lower reaches of the charts for a variety of small labels: Long Distance (with a rendition of Elvis' "Can't Help Falling In Love!"), Dream, Sleeping Bag, and others. So far the '90s have been quiet years for the E-Man, but as a 1993 appearance at New York City's Sounds Of Brazil nightclub from the re-formed Jimmy Castor Bunch proved, Jimmy Castor, still youthful in his early fifties, still has plenty spark left in him. I wouldn't count him out, not by a long shot.

—James "The Hound" Marshall
WFMU, 91.1 FM, East Orange, New Jersey



1. **HEY, LEROY, YOUR MAMA'S CALLIN' YOU**

(Jimmy Castor/John Pruitt)
Smash single #2069 (11/66) A
(R&B #16, Pop #31)

2. **SOUTHERN FRIED FRIJOLES**

(Jimmy Castor/John Pruitt)
From the album *Hey Leroy, Your Mama's Callin' You* (6/67) A

3. **IT'S JUST BEGUN**

(Jimmy Castor/John Pruitt/Gery Thomas) Arr. by J.C./G.T.
From the album *It's Just Begun* (3/72) B

4. **TROGLODYTE (CAVE MAN)**

(Jimmy Castor/Gery Thomas/Douglas Gibson/Harry Jensen/Bobby Manigault/Langdon Friddle, Jr.) JCB
RCA single #1029 (4/72) B
(R&B #4, Pop #6)

5. **SAY LEROY (THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON IS YOUR FATHER)**

(Jimmy Castor/John Pruitt/Gery Thomas/Douglas Gibson/Harry Jensen) JCB
RCA single #1024 (4/72) [withdrawn] C

6. **MAGGIE**

(Lolly Vegas) J.C./G.T.
Atlantic single #3021 (4/74) E

7. **BERTHA BUTT BOOGIE**

(Jimmy Castor/John Pruitt) J.C.
Atlantic single #3232 (11/74) F
(R&B #22, Pop #16)

8. **POTENTIAL**

(Elwood Henderson, Jr.) J.C./E.H.
Atlantic single #3270 (6/75) F
(R&B #25)

9. **SUPERSOUND**

(Jimmy Castor/John Pruitt) J.C.
Atlantic single #3316 (2/76) G
(R&B #42)

10. **KING KONG**

(Jimmy Castor/John Pruitt) J.C.
Atlantic single #3295 (9/75) G
(R&B #23, Pop #69)

11. **BOM BOM**

(Ezuma) J.C. Hrs J.C./G.T.
Atlantic single #3331 (5/76) G
(R&B #97)

12. **SPACE AGE**

(Elwood Henderson, Jr.) E.H./G.T.
Atlantic single #3375 (12/76) H
(R&B #28, Pop #101)

13. **THE RETURN OF LEROY PT. I**

(Jimmy Castor/John Pruitt) J.C.
Atlantic single #3424 (8/77) I

14. **MAXIMUM STIMULATION**

(Elwood Henderson, Jr.) E.H.
Atlantic single #3455 (12/77) I
(R&B #82)

15. **DON'T DO THAT! (SINGLE EDIT)**

(Jimmy Castor/Daniel Lewittes) J.C./G.T.
Cotillion single #44253 (5/79) K
(R&B #50)

16. **LET IT OUT**

(Elwood Henderson, Jr.) E.H./J.C./G.T.
Drive single #6276 (5/79) J

17. **I PROMISE -**

Jimmy Castor & The Juniors
(Jimmy Castor/Jimmy Smith)
Wing/Mercury single #90078 (5/56) *

NOTE: Numbers in *italics* (following original single release information) denote peak positions on *Billboard's* R&B/Soul Singles and "Hot 100" charts respectively - courtesy BPI Communications and Joel Whitburn's Record Research Publications.

All selections are full-length album versions except where otherwise indicated.

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Various Artists: Didn't It Blow Your Mind! Soul Hits Of The '70s, Vols. 1-15 (#70761-70790, 70551-70555)
Various Artists: In Yo' Face! The History Of Funk, Vols. 1-5 (#71431-71435)

Original Album Sources/Discography:

A. **Hey Leroy, Your Mama's Callin' You** ¹

Smash #67091 (6/67)

B. **It's Just Begun** ²

RCA #4640 (3/72)

C. **Phase Two** ²

RCA #4783 (8/72)

D. **Dimension III** ²

RCA #0103 (6/73)

E. **Jimmy Castor (The Everything Man) And The Jimmy Castor Bunch** ³

Atlantic #7305 (5/74)

F. **Butt Of Course...** ⁴

Atlantic #18124 (1/75)

G. **Supersound** ⁴

Atlantic #18150 (10/75)

H. **E-Man Groovin'** ⁴

Atlantic #18186 (8/76)

I. **Maximum Stimulation** ²

Atlantic #19111 (11/77)

J. **Let It Out** ²

Drive #107 (7/78)

K. **The Jimmy Castor Bunch** ²

Cotillion #5215 (7/79)

* non-LP single side

1. Jimmy Castor
2. The Jimmy Castor Bunch
3. Jimmy Castor (The Everything Man) And The Jimmy Castor Bunch
4. The Jimmy Castor Bunch, featuring The Everything Man

ALL ALBUMS PRODUCED BY CASTOR—PRUITT PRODUCTIONS, except:

Hey Leroy, Your Mama's Callin' You (A)
PRODUCED BY LUCHI DE JESUS
The Jimmy Castor Bunch (K)
PRODUCED BY CASTOR—PRUITT-THOMAS

The Jimmy Castor Bunch (1966-79):

JIMMY CASTOR (A-K): *lead & background vocals; tenor, alto & soprano saxes, timbales, cowbell, guro, vibes, tympani drums, cabasa, rhythm piano* on "The Return Of Leroy Pt. I"

KEN MILLS (A): *piano*
HILLARD GIBSON (A): *guitar*
PAUL MARTINEZ (A): *bass*
REGINALD BARNES (A): *drums*
MARTIN CHARLES (A): *congas*
RICHARD LANDRUM (A): *congas*
GERRY THOMAS (B-K): *keyboards, trumpet, flugelhorn, glockenspiel, cowbell, orchestrations, background vocals*

LANGDON "LENNY" FRIDIE, JR. (B-K): *congas, triangle*

DOUGLAS GIBSON (B-G): *bass*

HARRY JENSEN (B-C): *guitar*
BOBBY MANIGAUULT (C): *drums*
ELLWOOD HENDERSON, JR. (E-K): *drums*

JEFFREY GRIMES (E-H, K): *lead & rhythm guitars, sitar*
PAUL FORNEY (H-K): *bass*
RAY BROWN (I-K): *keyboards* (at personal appearances)
LEBURN MADDOX (I-J): *guitar*
NATE WINGFIELD (K): *guitar*
WILLIAM KING (K): *bongos*



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THE EVERYTHING MAN